



GRIZZLY GOUGE

OFFICIAL REGIMENTAL COMBAT TEAM 5 NEWSLETTER

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The SITREP

The Marines and Sailors of Regimental Combat Team 5 are quickly approaching the two-month mark of their deployment in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Time has been flying by as they have been hard at work supporting operations throughout southern Helmand province.

On Sept. 7 the RCT-5 command attended an Afghan Uniformed Police Academy graduation in Lashkar Gah. Approximately 220 brand new patrolmen and non-commissioned officers graduated from the course, returning to their respective districts as the new face of local security. They have since been protecting the people of Marjah, Nawa and Garmsir from insurgents as we gradually hand over more and more responsibility to Afghan security forces.

Afghan Local Police academies have also been established in each southern Helmand district. The academies run monthly courses, producing patrolmen who learn basic policing skills through study of the Afghan constitution and penal codes and practical application of handcuffing, baton, marksmanship and force protection techniques.

On Sept. 11, RCT-5 conducted a remembrance service precisely a decade after the first airplane impacted the north tower of the World Trade Center. During the service Col. Roger Turner, RCT-5 commanding officer, urged those assembled to remember all those who lost loved ones during the attacks and in the decade since. He also reminded the crowd why we are still in Afghanistan a decade after the attacks on our nation.



CAMP DWYER, Helmand province, Afghanistan - U.S. Marine Gen. James F. Amos, Commandant of the Marine Corps, shakes hands with a Cpl. Zachary Johansen, a Marine with Regimental Combat Team 5, here, Sept. 22. Amos and Sgt. Maj. Michael P. Barrett, Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, visited RCT-5 during their battlefield circulation of forward operating bases in southern Helmand province. (Photo by Lance Cpl. Daniel D. Kujanpaa/Released)

"These attacks were planned, developed and launched by Al Qaeda in a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan," said Turner. "The reason Al Qaeda is not here and the Taliban is not here is because we are."

On Sept. 13, members of RCT-5 attended a shura for the Voices of Religious Tolerance program in Garmsir. This program was originally a partnered initiative between the Afghan government, the Kingdom of Jordan, RCT-1 and the U.S. Department of State that exposed 30 key leaders from Garmsir, Marjah, Nawa and Lashkar Gah districts to a prosperous, moderate and modern Islamic society.

The program's key themes of tolerance and cooperation with Muslims and non-Muslims alike were reinforced by district officials during the reunion shura. Afghan led events like this are clear signs of progress in Garmsir district and throughout our AO.

Schools around southern Helmand began opening in later September. Each district showed an increase in the number of students attending school, with Garmsir doubling its student population from last year. Additionally, officials in each district are continuously pushing to move as many of their students from tent schools to permanent structures as possible.

A visit from the Commandant and Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps capped off an exciting month for the Marines and Sailors aboard Camp Dwyer. Gen. James Amos and Sgt. Maj. Micheal Barrett stopped by RCT-5 as part of their circulation of forward operating bases in southern Helmand province. On Sept. 22, the Commandant and Sergeant Major addressed the Marines and Sailors of RCT-5, discussing the state of current counterinsurgency operations, answering

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The Monthly Moto

Greetings friends and families of the Fighting Fifth,

I hope this letter finds you all in the best of health and spirits. As for all of us here in sunny Afghanistan, we're fighting the fight and doing just fine thank you.

Well, our first month here has been both interesting and productive. During the month of September we've promoted a number of Warriors (listed on the last page of this newsletter). Additionally, we just promoted Chief Hospital Corpsman Michael J. Donadio to his present rank on 16 September 2011. Chief Donadio is a native of Sylva, North Carolina and has been with the Regiment for over a year. He's been a fine member of our team and we're blessed to have him and his team looking out for us.

We also just reenlisted a number of great Warriors during our first month here. Gunnery Sergeants Carerro and Juarez are our two most senior leaders continuing the fight. Congratulations to them and their families. SSgt Haight, Sergeants Biggs, Bushnell, and Hoverson are also pressing the attack and staying Marine. Finally, Corporals Kirby, Longoria, Mathews, Thompson and Rivera are bringing up the tail end of our reenlistees. Once again congratulations to these fine young men and their families.

Anyways, more good news, as we've promoted a number of our Marines as of 1 October, 2011. We promoted seven of our young Marines to the rank of Lance Corporal (LCpl). LCpls Alexander Akhromtsev, Jaron Cofield, Stefan Donawa and Kendrick Johnson all of our Supply Section. LCpls Shawn Swigert, Matthew Truitt and Michael Wood all of our Motor Transportation Section. The next group of young Warriors were all selected and promoted to Corporal (Cpl). Cpls Ivan Garciamunoz, Brent Garrison, Forrest Green, Patrick Moley and Joseph Tate. Congratulations to our Warriors and their families, the future of our Corps is in good hands.

Speaking of fine Americans, I want to brag on our Dana Point Support Group located in Dana Point, California. A beautiful sea side city filled with the greatest folks you'll ever meet. Mr. Pete Hammer is the founder and President of our support group and he's surrounded with a company of warfighters himself. In the last 45 days, we've received dozens and dozens of care packages with tons of supplies. The most notable item being sheets, pillows and pillow cases. I can't tell you how much better we sleep being on linen vice being in a sleeping bag. Additionally we've been showered with bags of coffee, and supplies too numerous to mention, so I'll just say we're blessed to have the DPSG on our side... Pete's talented team consists of Terry Rifkin, John and Wanda Hicks and I can't brag about this group of angels enough.

Anyways, my last letter spoke of how important this phase of operations is, and during the last 45 days or so that we've been here, we have cleared our area of a number of bad guys. In addition to getting rid of bad guys, we've initiated or reinforced plans that were in place to construct new police stations and



Sgt. Maj. Hoopii poses for a picture with Afghan National Army Soldiers during a recent battlefield circulation to Marjah and Nawa districts.

Army camps for our Afghan partners. The last two weeks Colonel Turner and myself have been out on the battle field visiting our Marines and Afghan partners, and I'm proud to tell you that our Marines and Afghans are doing well.

Every camp I visit I make a sincere effort to see and speak to our Marines and Afghans. Our guys believe in their mission and all the good that they are doing both for America and Afghanistan. Every chance I get to speak with our Afghan security forces, I tell them how proud I am of them and all the good that they are doing for their country. I have told them that I'd like to see an Olympic team from Afghanistan like all of the other countries and they smile and give me the thumbs up with broken English saying, "Good." I can't tell you how proud I'd be to see that, because I know that we, our Marines, help make that dream come true.

As always, I want to thank our Family Readiness Officer, Ms. Kimberly Merkel and her team of Family Readiness Assistants who are doing a superb job in keeping our families and friends advised of all RCT-5 related news and events. If you've got any questions or concerns, you can always review our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/RegimentalCombatTeam5 or our website at <http://www.i-mef.usmc.mil/external/1stmardiv/5thmarreg/> for any information concerning the Regiment and our Marines.

Finally behalf of my family and I, I want to thank you for supporting our Marines and sailors. We are truly blessed having you watching our back as we move forward on our Mission.

Semper Fidelis!

Ernest Hoopii

Sergeant Major

Regimental Combat Team 5

Helmand Province, Afghanistan

FRO-Zone

"It ain't so 'til it's from the FRO"

Hey Families and Friends!

While our 5th Marines are making us proud, the families back home are allowing no slack! We are picking up more momentum this month so here are some highlights from the Home Team.

Care Packages – "Love in a box" and they are swimming in it! Sgt-Maj Hoopii says they've got more sheets and treats than they know what to do with! Those personal and homemade care packs are great but let's not be wasteful. If you know organizations who want to support Marines, send them to me and I'll direct that great support to other units with boots on the ground or wounded warrior organizations to share the love.

Rumor Control – It's a given that rumors and misinformation swirl relentlessly among families and Marines. It has a negative impact for everyone by destroying unit cohesion and morale. If news is not coming from me thru official unit communication channels, it just "ain't so." Squash irresponsible rumor-mongering by checking the facts first and resisting the temptation to perpetuate "scuttlebutt" (Navy slang for rumors).

Communication – Every Marine unit uses the Marine Online (MOL) Family Readiness Email System to send out unit messages from "no-reply@mol.usmc.mil." Unfortunately we (and every Marine Corps unit) are discovering this system is not as consistent with delivery of email messages as we had hoped. It is very difficult for us to pinpoint where the errors are occurring – it seems to be internal programming issues at much higher levels than us at the user level. What we can do is reassure you we are doing our best to figure out where the gaps are, report them and cover them with other methods.

To cover the gaps we have some redundancy built into our communication plan:

- Facebook - an announcement will be posted to www.facebook.com/RegimentalCombatTeam5 or www.facebook.com/5thMarines to notify the general audience when a message has been sent, so you can know to check. Sometimes the actual message will be posted as a Facebook Note.



- Family Readiness Assistants (FRA) - If you normally receive MOL email messages but think you missed one, contact your section Family Readiness Assistant and they will forward you a copy of the message. You should have received an introductory email from me about who your Family Readiness Assistant is and how to reach them. Please keep their contact info on hand as well. When a unit deploys the workload for families can increase dramatically – so we call on volunteer support for faster response times. If you have any questions or concerns about how that works, please let me know directly.

- Phone – our Family Info Hotline is another great way to keep up with news about RCT-5. Save this number to your phones and call it any time. Every week there is a new message with a new Marine or Sailor giving a shout-out to his or her family. 866-676-0662, Option 9, 9, 5. This is a great option for those without personal computers or those who like things more "old-school."

Monthly Events – RCT-5 is based out of Camp Pendleton so those families who remained in the Southern California area are highly encouraged to come out for all of our monthly events. Our volunteers have pledged to sponsor one event every month for the duration of the deployment. Most of our events are free or low-cost and focused on fun. If you want to help we welcome everyone – spouses, kids, parents, friends, etc. (See page 8 for a list of events.)

I'm keeping this one short and sweet – thanks for reading and keep in touch!

Your FRO,

Kim Merkel

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The Chaplain's Corner

"Entering into Cruise Mode"

With us now almost two months into our deployment, you're probably settling into a routine that my wife calls "cruise mode." Even on cruise mode, though, 10 months apart from your spouse can feel a bit overwhelming. Part of surviving such a long separation involves – just like anything else – keeping the right attitude. Here are a few basic tips on how to get through the remainder of your 'cruise'.

First, I personally find it easier to think of this not so much as a monster deployment but as a one-year unaccompanied assignment. In the Marine Corps and Navy, we're wired to think of deployments as being six or seven months long. Perhaps having had challenging six month deployments in the past, twelve months can seem almost insurmountable. But a year-long assignment broken up by a couple of weeks leave seems – at least for me – a lot easier to handle.

Second, break up the time by looking forward to milestones. Birthdays and holidays all



Cmdr. Winward is pictured here with his wife, KC, one our RCT-5 Family Readiness assistants.



Cmdr. Mark S. Winward is the RCT-5 Regimental Chaplain. He is available anytime for pastoral counseling or personal support by contacting him at mark.winward@afg.usmc.mil.

mark the time by dividing it up into smaller chunks. For my birthday, I asked my family to have a cake for me. If you have access to Skype or telephone, share the celebration with each other. Looking forward to Halloween, Christmas/Hanukah, New Years, Easter/Passover, and the leave block all will all make the time go by a lot faster.

Third, become involved in a supportive community that will adopt you as one of its own. That may be working with the FRO/FRA, helping out in community outreach, or becoming involved in your church or synagogue. Guaranteed, you'll develop new relationships and build greater resiliency with a strong social web of support.

Finally, say your prayers and read the scriptures. If you don't know where to start, consider following my Daily Inspiration, a daily spiritual reflection found on my Facebook page, Grizzly Chaps. Scripture and prayer will feed your soul, help you develop spiritual resources for dealing with the stresses of deployment, and – with your spouse doing the same – draw both of you closer together.

Practice these simple tips and by homecoming you'll be wondering where all the time went!

Chaplain Winward's Facebook page can be found at www.facebook/GrizzlyChaps.

Eye in the Sky: RCT-5 conducts air interdiction drill

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Andrew Miller

CAMP DWYER, Helmand province, Afghanistan – Marines with Regimental Combat Team 5 and Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment, conducted an Air Interdiction Force exercise here, Sept. 18.

The AIF is an essential tool in interdicting insurgent trafficking of narcotics and improvised explosive device making materials in southern Helmand province. More than sixty percent of insurgent funding comes from the Afghan opium trade, with more than half of that opium grown in Helmand province. Cutting off insurgent supply routes and major sources of funding like the narcotics trade will, in theory, substantially reduce their effectiveness.

During a routine AIF mission, vehicles spotted in areas with known insurgent trafficking routes will be stopped for a closer inspection. There have been numerous cases of these vehicle stops producing over 1,000 lbs of confiscated opium. The RCT remains vigilant via these AIF training exercises, anticipating more large finds in the future.

"During today's exercise we had two Cobras that stopped two vehicles that were driving along known drug smuggling lines out in the middle of the desert," Capt. Preston Stephens, RCT-5 assistant air officer, explained. "We had two 53's that then landed and the Marines got out to begin the search."

Stephens, a native of Pensacola, Fla., said that Marines conducting AIF missions are not only looking for drugs.

"They searched the vehicles looking for weapons, drugs, Marine Corps uniforms, IED making materials and any other indicators that they might be up to no good," he said. "Although a lot of times when we stop a vehicle in a real scenario we don't find anything, word is still going to spread that if you are driving around the desert suspiciously, the Marines are going to stop you."



CAMP DWYER, Helmand province, Afghanistan – Marines with Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment exit a CH-53 helicopter during an Air Interdiction Force training exercise here, Sept. 18. The exercise helped to enhance the ability of Regimental Combat Team 5 to disrupt weapons and drug smuggling routes.

As part of the exercise, role players hid suspicious items in similar locations to those found by Marines in past AIF missions. Among the items hidden in the vehicles were an AK-47 rifle, small packets of drugs, cell phones and sim cards.

According to Capt. Darren Wallace, the 1/25 commander and a native of Katy, Texas, the AIF drill served as an opportunity for his company to master all aspects of an interdiction mission. The reserve battalion, based out of Plainville, Conn., conducted vehicle searches, field interviews, posted security and detained role players during the drill.

While some Marines were searching vehicles and collecting evidence, others provided security so field interviews of the suspects could be conducted. The evidence and information collected during this phase of the mission and the manner in which they are collected is critical, according to Capt. Robert Anderson, RCT-5 deputy staff judge advocate. After sufficient evidence has been collected, suspects become detainees and

the second half of the interdiction fight begins. Anderson and his legal team take action at this point, carefully reviewing the evidence in each case with the goal of successfully prosecuting detainees in the Afghan court system.

"We have to be involved from the very beginning, and there has to be evidence that will tie the detainees to that crime," said Anderson, a native of New Orleans. "You have to be able to tell the story before anyone can question what you are saying."

The importance of these interdiction operations cannot be understated. They are an essential aspect of the counterinsurgency fight, but they carry an inherent level of risk.

"The AIF mission is conducted in remote parts of the Helmand desert, and they generally operate very far away from friendly forces," Wallace said. "There is always risk when you are operating far

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Life on a swivel

Story and photos by Cpl. Colby Brown

GARMSIR DISTRICT, Helmand province, Afghanistan — Another clearing operation means another chance to pinpoint a different perspective on deployment through the eyes Marines with 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment.

Over the past five months I have neglected a key person involved in transporting personnel and equipment around the battlefield — the turret gunner. They are the pair of legs that I share inside of a truck with whenever I go on a mounted patrol. These Marines get the style of a convertible, minus a windshield, air conditioning and comfortable leather seats.

During a recent clearing operation in northern Garmsir, I spent my time with the turret gunner, experiencing what he goes through on a daily basis. The turret has its perks, but is widely known as the worst seat on a mounted patrol.

A Marine uses his first couple days in the turret getting acclimated to his new environment, constantly watching the passing Afghan panorama for suspicious or dangerous activity.

"I didn't really know what to expect," said Lance Cpl. Matthew Wise, a turret gunner with Jump Platoon, 1/3 and a native of Magnolin, Ark. "I remember getting really nervous the first couple of times, especially being in the front turret on the convoy because you're the first set of eyes. You just have to stay vigilante because you're responsible for the security of the four other guys in the truck."

I quickly learned that being dirty is very much part of the job. Dust constantly fumes whoever stands in the turret and no matter how long the trip, you can always count on having a thick layer caked on the exposed parts of your face.

"Usually the last gunner has it the worst," Wise said. "He looks like a sand person from star wars when he comes down from the gun. But you learn to deal with, clean up and just keep rolling. It definitely sucks though."



GARMSIR DISTRICT, Helmand province, Afghanistan — Dust swarms around a convoy with 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, transporting local leaders to a shura and dinner here, Sept. 20. From Sept. 19 to 24, elements from Bravo and Hotel Company partnered with their Afghan National Security Force counterparts to clear compounds and roads in an area of Garmsir with a reduced presence of coalition forces.

A seat strap runs across the opening of the turret so the gunner can sit down, however the rugged Afghan terrain prohibits almost any sense of relaxation while in the turret. You constantly have to brace for bumps and potholes, both of which can be a couple feet deep.

"The terrain here is pretty bad," Wise said. "Sometimes you see the potholes and you get to brace for it, sometimes you don't and you get beat up. It's inevitable that you're going to hit your ribs on the gun from a bump. But you just have to keep going."

Although a turret gunner is in a truck with four other Marines, they can feel isolated. To say anything to the Marines inside the truck, the gunner must compete with noise from the engine and wind.

The isolated position in the turret does have its advantages. A Marine in the turret can see much more of the Afghan terrain than those inside the vehicle, who have a one-foot by one-foot, tinted window to look through.

A deployment in Afghanistan as a turret gunner provides a much different experience than Marines who patrol on foot. Although you don't walk as much as Marines patrol-

ling on foot, your legs ache from constant unbalance caused by rugged terrain. When you pass a squad of Marines, it's hard not to wish you down there on solid ground.

Life in the turret is also much more impersonal. Rarely do you get to interact with the local people. You're stuck, perpetually scanning — 'up in the gun.'

Bored children, having nothing better to do, often throw rocks at the battalion's armored vehicles. It must be a game because you rarely see them smile as much as they do when they throw rocks. Who can really blame them? As a child I remember throwing rocks at cows in the pasture behind my house; it's just one of those things children do. Those not throwing rocks give a thumbs up or shake the shaka, or hang loose, sign.

After the first few weeks up in the gun, the Afghan panorama loses its initial appeal and being a turret gunner becomes more of a normal job.

"Sometimes you get downtime sometimes you don't," Wise said. "This year is a change of pace. Sometimes we stay out in the [vehicles] for days at a time."

As a turret gunner, your primary responsibility is the security of your vehicle and convoy

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away from friendly lines. There is always the possibility that the vehicle being stopped will not want to be stopped, and the majority of individuals driving that far out in the desert are armed, generally for self protection or protection of the cargo they are carrying."

On this particular day, the training mission was a complete success. Vehicles were stopped, evidence was collected and the detainees were transported to the proper detention facility as evidence was reviewed by Anderson and his team. The Marines remained vigilant throughout the exercise, conducting a thorough search of vehicles and personnel while maintaining an active security posture.

Now that the 1/25 Marines are certified to work alongside RCT-5 in executing interdiction operations, these missions will continue to improve security and stability in southern Helmand province. Proficiency with interdiction tactics and techniques will allow Marines to effectively train their Afghan counterparts to conduct these missions. As with all other coalition actions, the future of interdiction operations lies in partnering with Afghan National Security Forces.



CAMP DWYER, Helmand province, Afghanistan - Marines with Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment search a suspicious vehicle during an Air Interdiction Force training exercise here, Sept. 18. The exercise helped to enhance the ability of Regimental Combat Team 5 to disrupt weapons and drug smuggling routes.

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whether on the move or stationary. Although my perspective of operating in the turret is limited, Marines who regularly have that duty stand for more than 10 hours a day. For the regulars, a perpetual grind of sand on teeth and layers of dust on the top half of your body is a daily experience. Work isn't finished when

they pull into base. Weapons must be cleaned, and vehicles must be refueled and refitted with water and food in preparation for the next day.

"Each job has its own challenges," Wise said. "Last year I didn't stay at as good as a position as I do this year. And this year I get to see all over the [area of operations] and all the different [patrol bases]."

After spending time with turret gunners, my respect for them has changed from 'oh, he's just another guy in the truck,' to 'sucks to be that guy.'

I certainly won't take my relatively comfortable seat in an armored vehicle for granted any longer.

The operation spanned from Sept. 19 to Sept. 24. Marines with Bravo and Hotel Company partnered with Afghan National Army soldiers and the Afghan National Police to clear compounds and roads in the northern part of Garmsir. The partnered forces focused on area bordered by two companies, which can easily become a seam of insurgent activity if neglected.

During the operation more than five suspected insurgents were detained. Although no other significant discoveries were made, the main priority of the operation was to interact with the people in the area. Every night a dinner and shura, attended by the district governor and battalion commander of 1/3, was held.

The battalion will look to continue its partnership with the Afghan National Security Forces in Garmsir. This operation was an opportunity for ANSF to become more confident in their abilities and learn from their Marine counterparts in an effort to transition to autonomous operations.



GARMSIR DISTRICT, Helmand province, Afghanistan — A local goat farmer directs his herd around a convoy with 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment here, Sept. 20. From Sept. 19 to 24, elements from Bravo and Hotel Company partnered with their Afghan National Security Force counterparts to clear compounds and roads in an area of Garmsir with a reduced presence of coalition forces.

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questions and handing out challenge coins to a lucky few.

Amos and Barrett said they were honored to be able to wear the same uniform as the RCT-5 Marines, urging them to “never lose sight of why [they] joined the Marine Corps.”

The Grizzly Gouge will keep you informed on the actions and operations of RCT-5 Marines and Sailors for the duration of their deployment in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. The next edition of the Gouge is scheduled to be released the first week of November.

The RCT-5 Public Affairs Office will continue to publish stories and photos detailing RCT-5's deployment from beginning to end. The two best places to see periodic coverage of events from southern Helmand province are the official RCT-5 Facebook page (www.facebook.com/RegimentalCombatTeam5) and the RCT-5 DVIDS page (<http://www.dvidshub.net/units/RCT5-MD>).

Congratulations to the following Marines promoted during the month of September!

Lance Cpl. Cody George
Lance Cpl. Joseph Snyder
Lance Cpl. Aaron Whitworth
Lance Cpl. Christopher Wilkins
Lance Cpl. Jerold Young
Cpl. Jonathan Chen
Cpl. Lawrence Cooke
Cpl. Carlos Grijalva
Cpl. Nicholas Hancox
Cpl. Justin Jones
Cpl. Brandon Woloschek
Sgt. Kevin Chason
Cmdr. Wayne Boucher



CAMP DWYER, Helmand province, Afghanistan - U.S. Marine Corps Pfc. Kyle Keel, with Motor Transport Platoon, Regimental Combat Team 5, prepares to fire an M2 Browning .50 cal under the supervision of 1st Lt. Shon Roegge, Motor T platoon commander, during a machine gun range here Sept. 26. The Marines conducted this training to maintain a state of combat readiness. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Daniel D. Kujanpaa/Released)

Upcoming Events

October: Baby Shower on October 16, from 2pm-4pm
(Please RSVP in advance)

November: “Miles for Marines” – we are putting together 5K and 10K teams to walk/run/stroll the Dana Point Turkey Trot on Thanksgiving morning.

December: Christmas party on December 10 (time is TBD)

From the Dana Point 5th Marine Regiment Support Group

Dear 5th Marines Family:

The Dana Point 5th Marine Regiment Support Group is here for YOU! Many of you already know of our existence, but for those of you who don't, the City of Dana Point adopted the 5th Marine Regiment in 2004. We are fortunate to have you as our Adoptive Unit, but with this honor and distinction goes an enormous amount of responsibility and commitment. Our mission is simple, to provide Support and Outreach to the 5th Marines & Sailors when deployed, and to take care of your families living in the Camp Pendleton area. Please check out our website at www.danapoint5thmarines.com for more information.

Semper Fi,
Terry Rifkin
Dana Point 5th Marine Regiment Support Group